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SUBJECT: YEMEN'S STARVING CHILDREN

¶1. A National Symposium on Child Poverty held November 24-25 in Sana'a reported that half of Yemeni children under the age of five are moderately to severely underweight. Infant mortality in Yemen is ten times the U.S. rate, and according to the World Food Program's (WFP) Jutta Neitzel, food expenditures in Yemen are on par with Somalia and the world's poorest nations. Traditional poverty measures, such as the "dollars a day" calculation, significantly underestimate child poverty, especially in traditional societies where adult men often get the lion's share of scant resources. In Yemen, rampant qat use among the poor drains even more resources that would otherwise go to feed children. Fawzia Noman, Deputy Minister for Girl's Education at the Ministry of Education, said, "There must be awareness among the men about the needs of women during pregnancy and after the children are born. Our society has things that need to change."

¶2. "Combating child poverty is the best possible allocation of Yemen's resources," said Alberto Minujin, an expert on social policy and children at the New School University. He explained that the country must develop economically and socially at the same time; it can't wait for economic growth to implement vital social policies. ROYG programs like the Social Fund for Development and the Social Welfare Fund, which aim to reduce poverty, face limited funding and other serious challenges; they have yet to demonstrate a significant impact in shrinking poverty. UNICEF officials hope that a study currently under way on child poverty will help spur better policies. The WFP is set to launch a program with the Ministry of Health in early 2009 to address the most acute cases of early childhood malnutrition.

COMMENT  
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¶3. Even the coalition of activists assembled by UNICEF to tackle the problem of child poverty had trouble coming up with policy-based solutions to the problem. Without a fierce ROYG commitment to fighting poverty, unlikely given other priorities, the future looks bleak for Yemen's hungry youth.  
END COMMENT.

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